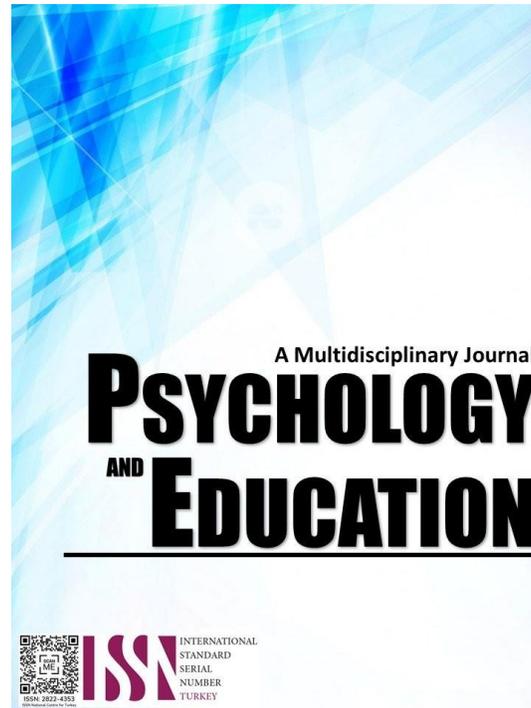


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Voices and Actions of Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore the narratives of disabled students at Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology - Dingle Campus. Key informants were purposefully selected, and the content analysis method was used to examine their stories during the pandemic. Interviews were conducted over a set period, and themes were generated through selective and open coding. Findings revealed that the most critical needs for college students with disabilities included scholarships to support their education, accessible services for more effortless movement in high-story buildings, and student assistance programs to build self-confidence and advocacy skills. Students faced various challenges, these includes physical obstacles like struggling to carry heavy items, dealing with stairs, and encountering bullying, especially from their peers. Inclusive classrooms play is important for embracing diverse learners and promoting success through tailored instruction. Teachers play an important role in maintaining school records, assisting with the recruitment of both students and teachers, and organizing training programs for everyone involved. They are also responsible for evaluating classroom instruction. This study emphasizes the importance of creating equitable and inclusive educational environments supported by clear guidelines for developing pedagogical interventions that promote academic success for all students.

Keywords: *inclusive education, learners with disabilities, college students*

Introduction

Iloilo State University College of Fisheries Science and Technology - Dingle Campus is the only university in the Municipality of Dingle. Despite what is happening in today's world, Commission on Higher Education has ensured that the state colleges and universities have come together to celebrate knowledge in facing education in this new era. Every effort is made to meet the demand for quality education for the college students who are physically disabled.

This study identifies an equitable, quality and proper guidance, educational interventions and equal opportunities in all the university ancillary services for the college students who are physically handicapped and currently enrolled at the Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology- Dingle Campus.

“An inclusive classroom is designed to welcome all types of learners, lends itself to differentiated instruction, and sets the stage for student success.”

Today our world is hit by a pandemic. Many people were lost. All are affected, but we never give up and never stop providing quality education. The Commission on Higher Education, in accordance with its mission, ensures that learning must continue. The Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology- Dingle Campus with the strong leadership of Engr. Rex L. Diaz, DIT with the determination and caring faculty of this humble institution, to serve people better by providing quality services specifically tailored to their needs fulfilling the vision, mission statements and in accordance with its guiding principles, ISDA which stands for Integrity, Social Justice, Discipline and Academic Excellence of the university. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as well as the Basic Education sectors in many countries have had to adapt teaching and learning strategies in this post pandemic period. Before the time of pandemic, blended learning was utilized and maximized in response to the pandemic, using the internet, television and even radio as alternative platforms for the college students to access educational resources. And even until now, these platforms have been allowed and used in an inevitable circumstance.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the implementation of policies supporting students with disabilities.
2. To suggest strategies for enhancing inclusivity, accessibility, and support services.
3. To examine the mental health and well-being of college students with disabilities.

Methodology

The following steps were utilized for the interview steps by (Creswell, 2016) in conducting interview for data collection. The key informants were purposively chosen and identified as learners with disabilities. Using the content analysis method, this study examined and analyzed the narratives and stories of the of the learners with disabilities in this time of pandemic. The data were collected over a certain period of time using interviews and the themes were drawn using open and selective coding. This research observed the ethical procedures in the conduct of the study. According to COPE, “good research should be well adjusted, well- planned, appropriately designed, and ethically approved. To conduct research to a lower standard may constitute misconduct.” The researchers will conduct

an activity such as written response from the informants or interview with recording materials to facilitate the data needed from the physically disabled students in four colleges of Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology - Dingle Campus.

Results and Discussion

The Basic Services with the College Students with Disabilities Need Most

Students living with a physical or learning disability have a right to attend college and receive accommodations to enable them to have a successful college experience. Transitioning from high school to college presents challenges for every student, and students with disabilities are no exception. If you're a student with a learning or physical disability, there are many resources to help you with homework, studying, and navigating daily life. Colleges and universities are continually strengthening their support services and resources, partially because of recent improvements in digital technologies but also because the number of people with disabilities attending college has increased.

On the question asked that what basic services, or innovation or programs you want to avail from the university?

One participant articulated:

"I want to avail free tuition or scholarships fees and allowances to support my studies."

The other participant also revealed that:

"Hoping that our university has a student assistant program that can help to support the financial status of my family."

So, education is the way out of poverty and the foundation for a better future. No doubt about it. The government supports equity by sponsoring local school scholarships. In the pursuit of higher education, every individual deserves equal opportunities to fulfill their academic aspirations. Unfortunately, disabled students often face unique challenges that can hinder their access to education. Recognizing this disparity, numerous scholarships have been established to empower disabled college students, providing financial assistance and fostering an inclusive educational environment.

Another participant expressed his thoughts by saying:

"Not just me but everyone wanted an innovation like a service that a no hustle to person with disability to process his/her papers in a many story building."

One of the primary needs for students with disabilities is a physically accessible campus infrastructure. This includes ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, ensuring that students with mobility impairments can navigate the campus independently. An inclusive physical environment sets the foundation for an inclusive educational experience.

In truth, building a more inclusive physical environment will benefit the whole academic community and the world at large as an evolved society is one that recognizes that people should be accommodated so that they can participate and be able to make contributions to the world as best they can.

Difficulties and Challenges Encountered

Everyone face difficulties and challenges in everyday life. More so, in this difficult time we have bombarded with so much of these. Our learners are vulnerable to difficulties and challenges on how to avail quality of education. College students with disabilities often face a range of difficulties and challenges that can impact their academic, social, and personal experiences. While advancements in accessibility and inclusivity have been made, there are still barriers that hinder the full integration of students with disabilities.

Our learners specially the learners with disabilities have been victims for overcoming difficulties and challenges encountered in this unprecedented time. Majority of the learners including the learners with disabilities have been tested and affected by this phenomenon their education has brought into cliff hanging.

On the question, what difficulties or challenges have you encountered in your life and where or who do you get your strength in facing these difficulties?

A heart-warming narrative from the participant was:

"Since I started schooling, I have classmates that love me, care me all the time. I'm very blessed with my classmates until now. I've encountered my difficulties in like where I can't do what my siblings or my classmates do like carrying heavy things."

College is a transformative journey where students embark on a path of self-discovery, academic growth, and personal development. However, for college students with disabilities, this journey often involves navigating a landscape of unique challenges that can lead to inevitable comparisons with their peers.

College life is inherently competitive, and students, whether consciously or unconsciously, compare themselves to their peers. For students with disabilities, this comparison can become a source of internal struggle as they may perceive themselves falling short in

certain aspects, be it academic achievements, social interactions, or extracurricular activities. For students with disabilities, the role of supportive classmates becomes particularly crucial in navigating the challenges unique to their educational experience. By fostering a culture of acceptance and understanding, they contribute to an atmosphere where students with disabilities feel welcomed and valued. This inclusivity extends beyond mere tolerance to genuine appreciation for diversity.

Another participant emotionally expressed his thoughts by saying:

“ I thank God that I am alive that even though I have this condition, I am still lucky. I saw the beautiful world. When I was in Grade 7, I was bullied in our classroom. Because of my condition that I am small. They don’t want to be friends because I’m short, they want to be friends with tall people. I was always alone in our classroom, I didn’t pay attention to them because I knew that they would bully me too. The only thing that gives me courage is my family who guides me and my daily changes to grow old and never give up.”

Students deserve a safe learning environment and it is difficult to come to an environment in which they are scared to be in. It is said that 160,000 children stay home every day because they do not want to be bullied by their peers (Flynt et.al.) They are worried about whether or not they will be picked on, and they eventually become so intimidated that they do not feel safe coming to school. This affects their ability and their right to have a good education. The Rehabilitation Act, and American With Disabilities Act of 1990, in section 504 all state the fact that children have “the right to learn in a safe environment” (Raskauskas et.al.). Bullying can become extremely stressful, especially for children with disabilities, making it harder to concentrate on their schoolwork, placing students at risk for poor academic achievement and failure.

Ensuring Inclusive Education

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity in higher education. Students with disabilities, like their peers, aspire to pursue academic excellence and personal growth. Creating an inclusive environment for college students with disabilities requires a multifaceted approach that addresses their diverse needs. Inclusive education is a cornerstone of a just and equitable society, recognizing the diverse needs and abilities of every learner.

Educators are at the forefront of inclusive education. Comprehensive training programs and ongoing professional development are essential to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to support students with diverse abilities. This includes understanding various learning styles, employing inclusive teaching strategies, and creating adaptive learning environments.

Relatively speaking, achieving inclusive and quality education in the Philippines reinforces the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven tools towards the goals of sustainable development. The goal will ensure free primary and secondary education for all girls and boys by 2030. It also aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, close gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to quality tertiary education. Education is the way out of poverty and the foundation for a better future. No doubt about it. The government supports equity by sponsoring local school scholarships, donating to the cause of building schools, providing high-quality localized books and educational materials, and providing high-tech facilities and equipment. We need to invest more in education locally and globally to achieve equitable competitiveness in education. Training teachers in remote areas of the Philippines. By simply helping break down some of the barriers to education, they do not only enrich the lives of individuals and level the playing field, but they also shape talented and value-based teachers to radiate to the lives of the students. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should be resilient, participative, cooperative and rigorous. Suggested guidance programs and activities can be part of developing and enhancing university’s initiatives. These initiatives are categorized as literacy programs, enrichment /improvement programs.

Conclusions

Relatively, in creating and achieving inclusivity of education at Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology - Dingle Campus revisit and redesign their localized innovations, interventions and programs to address not only the learners with disabilities but also for all learners. And that, the university is ought to provide and deliver equal access to affordable learning atmosphere, to eliminate gender and discrimination.

Based from the preceding themes, the following conclusions were made:

Appropriate accommodations are authentic and maximized when they are tailored to student- expressed strengths and needs. Strategies like Universal Design for Learning, peer mentoring, and evidence-based interventions can foster learning communities where all students are supported throughout their college experience. Such practices could bridge the gap between student frustration and academic success.

Scholarships for disabled college students are not just financial aid programs; they are instruments of empowerment, equality, and societal transformation. It is crucial to continue supporting and expanding these scholarship programs to ensure that every student, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to pursue higher education and fulfill their potential.

The school’s programs, interventions and innovations must be inclusive, quality and accessible to all learners in conformity to the Commission on Higher Education’s vision, mission and core values.

The following recommendations are advanced in consideration of the findings presented:

Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Conduct a thorough needs assessment to understand the diverse needs of college students with disabilities. This can include physical, cognitive, emotional, and social needs. By identifying specific challenges, the intervention program can be tailored to address the unique requirements of each individual.

Life Skills Training. Include components of life skills training in the intervention program. Focus on building skills such as communication, self-advocacy, problem-solving, and decision-making, which are essential for the independence and empowerment of college students with disabilities.

Long-Term Support Systems. Develop mechanisms for long-term support, including post-intervention follow-up and ongoing resources for college students with disabilities. Creating networks and support systems can contribute to sustained success beyond the immediate scope of the intervention program.

Community Integration and Awareness Campaigns. Promote community integration by organizing awareness campaigns that educate the public about the abilities and potential of college students with disabilities. Foster an inclusive community environment that supports and embraces diversity.

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